

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5361

As of February 23, 2009

Title: An act relating to feeding hungry children through school breakfast and lunch programs and summer food service programs.

Brief Description: Feeding hungry children through school breakfast and lunch programs and summer food service programs.

Sponsors: Senators McDermott, Swecker, Pridemore, Oemig, Marr, Jarrett, Kohl-Welles, Fraser, Kline, Murray, Kastama, McCaslin, Shin, Haugen and Kilmer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/18/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: Nearly all Washington school districts participate in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program to provide meals and snacks for students during the school day. Schools and other nonprofit organizations can also participate in summer feeding programs that target areas with high numbers of low-income children. Children in families with incomes of less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for free meals; those with incomes up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

The costs of operating these programs are largely paid by the federal government, plus meal fees charged to students and a limited amount of required state matching funds. The reduced-price copayment for breakfast is \$0.30; for lunch the copayment is \$0.40.

In 1993 the Washington Legislature created the "Meals for Kids" initiative, which provided state funds to school districts to support operating costs of school breakfast programs and to provide grants to school districts to offset the costs of starting and maintaining summer feeding programs. In 2006 additional funding was provided to help schools with the costs of meals, plus eliminate the reduced-price breakfast copayment. In the 2007-2009 budget additional funding was provided to eliminate the reduced-price lunch copayment for students in kindergarten through grade three.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature intends to maintain its current commitment to provide free meals to hungry low-income students in public schools and to phase in free school lunches to all low-income students at all grade levels.

The Legislature must appropriate sufficient funds to school districts to (1) eliminate the breakfast copayment for all students who qualify for reduced-price lunch; and (2) eliminate the lunch copayment for all kids in preschool through grade six who qualify for reduced-price lunch.

To the extent funds are appropriated, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must provide state support for summer food service programs. Funds must be used for operating costs, including the food and labor costs.

To the extent funds are appropriated for grants to organizations to start or expand summer food service programs, OSPI must conduct two cycles of grants. A fall cycle of grants of up to \$20,000 can be used to build local program capacity, and a spring cycle of grants of up to \$5,000 can be used for expenses related to initiating a new program. Organizations receiving grants in the fall must provide evidence of successful community program development. By January 15, 2011, OSPI must report to the education committees of the Legislature on the use of the grants and on the outcomes related to the summer food service programs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Washington State was the first state in the nation to reduce the co-pay for breakfast, which actually increased the number of kids participating. The initial plan for this bill was to eliminate the co-pay for lunch in grades four through 12 as well, but due to the fiscal environment it is scaled back to prekindergarten through grade six. Forty cents for lunch is a barrier to some children. As things become more uncertain at home, schools need to be a safe place for children, including a place where they know they will get meals. Often the child not paying attention in class is the one who has not had anything to eat all day. Hungry kids cannot learn. Meals can help to reduce absenteeism and tardiness and improve test scores. Leaving childhood hunger to chance will not produce the strong workforce we need.

By including summer programs, this bill recognizes that hunger does not take a vacation. It is often difficult for children to get to a summer food program site; thus expanding the outreach is important. Additional resources for summer food programs would allow for further research on program sites and more equipment to transport meals. Also, the money goes back into the local economy for purchasing food. This bill places in statute the Legislature's budget commitments made in 2006 and 2008. Increasing access and eligibility for school meals will help end hunger in the state. We want to make sure the foundation in public schools is solid.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator McDermott, prime sponsor; Linda Stone, Children's Alliance; Lincoln Pierce, Bethel School District, Washington School Nutrition Association; Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association; Kelsey Beck, Food Lifeline; Kevin Glackin-Coley, Food Connection; Doug Nelson, Public School Employees, SEIU.